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ABSTRACT

West Indian family organization has been observed to exhibit relatively greater instances of brittle common law unions, out-of-wedlock births, and female headed households than is the case with other New World populations. Three primary explanations have been given to explain the presence of these patterns: the retention or reinterpretation of African sociocultural patterns; the effects of slavery; and the adaption to economic marginality. All of these arguments, however, support the view that such patterns are dysfunctional or maladaptive in the industrial or industrializing society. This paper used a Jamaican case study to document an opposing view. The main argument here is that flexibility in West Indian domestic patterns promotes greater survival in the change from a subsistence to a cash economy. The foundation of this survival strategy is the kinship system. Kinship provides individuals with rights and obligation to others in terms of support. This support is provided primarily through household flexibility. Conjugality acts to extend the kinship system, that is, the more unions established, the greater the growth of this support system. (Author)

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"HOUSEHOLD, FAMILY AND KINSHIP AS MECHANISMS OF SURVIVAL IN A CHANGING SOCIETY: A JAMAICAN EXAMPLE"

By

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Introduction

The main function of society is the survival of the human group through the cooperative efforts of its members. Anthropologists have identified three units of social organization basic to all human societies: residence, kinship, and marriage. By studying cultural rules of organization in these three areas of social relationships, anthropologists have been able to analyze how societies have historically adapted to their respective environments. The problem is that anthropologists have traditionally limited this type of analysis to traditional static societies. Only recently have we truned our attention to kinship, marriage, and residence as strategies of adaptation in complex, rapidly changing societies. (e.g. See Gonzalez, 1969, Simic, 1972, and Brandes, 1975). This paper is a further study using such an analysis. The site of our study is a rapidly urbanizing community in Jamaica, West Indies.

Jamaica: Development Without Employment

Jamaica is experiencing economic difficulties which have been a persistent characteristic of West Indian plantation societies. Although rapid economic growth has been recorded in a number of these countries since the Second World War, particularly in the larger islands like Jamaica, unemployment and absolute poverty have been on the increase. This problem is in part due to the smallness of these societies with their miniscule resource bases allowing for a production that is so narrow in its scope that many subsistence items must continue to be exported, and too small in quantity to allow effective competition in the international market place. Even in the case of domestic industries, domestic markets are so small that some industries cannot operate at efficient levels of production (Demas, 1965:23).

But in addition to the smallness of these societies, there are structural and attitudinal patterns that were established during the period of slavery, and perpetuated through the colonial period, and still contribute to this "persistent poverty," as Beckford (1972) calls it.

These societies were initiated to satisfy the needs and whims of European metropolitan powers and from this beginning social, economic, and political patterns have continued to be characterized by loyalties to external sovereignties. Local economic systems were poorly developed during the slave period because a good portion of the economic returns from the exploitation of local resources and labor were taken outright by the metropolitan power, and that which were left were monopolized by a small number of absentee landlords who spent most of their time and money in the metropole. Economic retardation was further advanced by the dominant status of the plantation in the local area, which forced the extinction of the small farming class, as well as created a wageless working class to monopolize the bulk of the work to be carried out, but could not stimulate the economy through buying and selling.

The situation created from over 200 years of slavery was not alleviated during a colonial period that lasted for more than an additional century. The slave masters had developed an economy based almost entirely on monocrop agriculture carried out on large landed estates. Following abolition, ex-slaves refused to continue working on the estates, a labor shortage was created prompting the importation of East Indians as plantation workers. This only worked to increase the proportion of paupers in already poor societies. Although plantation economies had been geared to the production of one major crop for an international market, these econo-

mies had come to find, even before the abolition of slavery, that they were poor competitiors in that market because of low productivity due to samll capital assets, archaic production techniques, and the minuteness of their resource bases. Meanwhile the bulk of the population, the ex-slaves had taken to small plots of land, less suitable for farming, where they were only able to eke out a subsistence, and in some cases sell a little in the internal market system, but having little to offer the international market place in what was fast becoming an international economic system. And, of course, the colonial status did not allow for a political autonomy which would allow economic experimentation and growth.

In Jamaica changes in labor and marketing in the post-slave period resulted in some plantations falling in the hands of the new peasantry resulting in an expansion of domestic production (Girvan, 1971:7). Coffee and bananas were added to sugar as export crops of some significance, but they only provided small, shortly lived and very intermittent growth spurts to a poor economy. The global economic depression of the 1930's was disastrous to the plantation economies of the Caribbean, resulting in the ante-bellum labor strikes and riots in 1938.

Following the war, the political leaders of Jamaica decided to break from the agrarian past and to become industrialized. With the adoption of a ten-year plan in 1946, the Jamaican government decided to place more emphasis on the development of the manufacturing sectors while mechanizing the agricultural sector. Solutions to unemployment problems were to be met in the non-agricultural sectors (Jefferson, 1972:6-10). By the late 1950's, many products that had previously been imported, were being manufactured locally and the gross domestic product from the manufacturing sector grew

from J$15.8 million in 1950 to J$165.5 million[1] in 1972, an overall growth rate of 947 percent (Statistical Yearbook of Jamaica, 1973).

Between 1950 and 1972, other areas of the economy were also stimulated, particularly tourism and mining (bauxite), and during that period the overall Gross Domestic Product of factor cost (GDP--value of products attributable to domestic factors of production) and Net National Product at Factor Cost or National Income (NI--net income earned by the factors of production owned by the normal residents of the country), the two most common measures of economic growth had increased by 445 and 699 percent respectively.

But these measurements of overall growth, while impressive, are also misleading. For example, there is a progressively increasing percentage of the GDP flowing into foreign hands because of the foreign control of large segments of both the industrial and the agricultural sectors of the economy.[2] This outflow of income is a major reason for the increasing gap between GDP and NI. This has resulted because the control over much of the manufacturing sectors are in the hands of foreign investors who were able to outlay the huge amount of capital necessary for initiating industrial growth. Moreover, such foreign investment were encouraged by the tax incentives and concessions on the import duties of foreign machinery and raw materials given to investors (Demas, 1973:14-15). Some of the most desirable pasturage and farm lands are owned, and in many cases, held idle by alien companies (Joint Action Council, 1974:15) or absentee landlords. And even some of the best beaches belong exclusively to foreigners.

Even the reported national income is misleading because of the gross disparage of income in Jamaica. In a study of comparative income distributions in 1958, it was shown that Jamaica ranked very low on a scale of

equality of income distribution among developing as well as developed countries. It was revealed that while 5 percent of the households in Jamaica received 30 percent of the total income, and 10 percent of the households received 43 percent of the total income, 60 percent of the households were left to share only 19 percent of the total income (Ahiram 1964, 1966).

One of the major reasons for the inequality of income distribution is that while a large number of Jamaicans cite farming as an occupation, most of the more productive land, which is owned by foreign interests or by indigenous landlords of huge estates, either lie idle or are producing with large labor contingencies receiving low wages.

While arguments for economic and political reforms that will give Jamaica control over its own resources and redistribute income and property ownership on a more egalitarian basis are quite valid, solutions must also be found to improve the productive capacities of the vast majority of the country's populace within the framework of the new technology. Jamaica is experiencing a problem shared by other developing nations: development without employment because of a scarcity of technical skills. Technical skills are predicated upon basic literacy abilities. As in other developing societies, almost half of the adult Jamaican populace are not able to read and write. Non-mechnanized agrarian economies did not demand much in terms of educational and technical skills from its labor force. During the colonial past, the few who did receive any significant training, were given primarily clerical skills, only enough, in the words of the Honorable Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica, "to keep the wheels of a colonial economy turning" (1974:142). The slave and colonial past resulted in

children being introduced into the labor force at a tender age. Even where schools were provided, low wages often times necessitated the labor of every available family member to keep the unit financially solvent, and school attendance was sacrificed.

Thus, mechanization, encouraged by foreign interests that were primarily concerned with minimizing costs and maximizing profits, has resulted in growing unemployment and underemployment. While it is true that Jamaica has experienced rapid growth in terms of Gross Domestic Product and National Income since 1943, the rate of employment has shown little improvement, and in actual numbers, employment has worsened. Between 1943 and 1960, the unemployment rate in Jamaica dropped from 25.1 percent of the total labor force to 13.5 percent, but by October of 1972 it was back up to 22.5 percent. In absolute numbers, unemployment dropped from 139.5 thousand in 1943 to only 88.5 thousand in 1960, but was back up to 181.8 thousand in 1972. (Jefferson, 1972, Government of Jamaica, 1973b:707).

Underemployment is illustrated by the fact that in 1972, 60.2 percent of the employable labor force was earning less than J$10 per week (Government of Jamaica, 1973b:740). The significance of this figure is that in seven years, between 1966 and 1973, the cost of living has more than doubled in both rural Jamaica and the Kingston Metropolitan area. Between 1967 and 1974, some of the Jamaican food staples have increased in retail price up to 300 percent (Government of Jamaica, 1973a:26; 1974:2).

Mechanization negatively affected employment not only because of the increase in job demands for skills among a highly unskilled populace, but also because it tended to remove many unskilled jobs. Mechanistic farming tended to cheapen farm labor while the new technology beckoned hordes to the city, with its advertisements of better paying and more exciting work.

But instead of work, the unskilled migrant find some of the more despicable products of the industrialized state: unemployment and underemployment, economic deprivation, crowded slums, and violent crime. A final feature of mechanization has been a growing inequality between skilled and privileged urban workers, and the urban unskilled and unemployed and the rural workers (Demas, 1973:15).

Havershom: Development Without Employment

Havershom, a community located in one of the sugar panshes, 25 to 30 miles west of Kingston is a microcosm of the wider society. The town is the site of the earliest English sugar plantations dating back to the latter half of the seventeenth century. The lushness of the region,which has supported such a long tradition of sugar production, has also contributed to the area's significance as a primary producer of tropical fruits, and other subsistence flora. These features, along with the presence of one of Jamaica's major rivers, has resulted in the area around Havershom as one of the earliest centers of the internal market system.[3] It is little wonder that during the movement toward industrialization following the war, the area around Havershom became one of the country's main industrial centers.

During the 1920's, a sugar factory was built which, in January of 1974, employed almost 600 persons. By the end of 1974, however, this factory laid off some two-thirds of its workers as it could not compete with larger factories with more advanced processing technology. The remaining employees were primarily mechanics and workers involved in the transportation of Havershom sugar to a larger factory for processing. But over 1000 jobs were still being offered by the five other food processing factories that have sprung up in the town in the last three decades. More-

over, within 10 miles of Havershom, there is a major bauxite mining plant which employs almost 3000 regular workers and 400 irregular employees. Yet and still, the problems of unemployment in Havershom, a community of about 7800 people within a mile square area, is still very severe.

From a survey of 238 randomly selected households in 1974, it was found that 177 had intact nuclear units. Fifty-seven of those 177 (32.2 percent) men were chronically unemployed, another 7 (4 percent) were irregularly employed, and another 26 (14.7 percent) had been laid off by the closing of the sugar factory. Thus, over half of the husband-fathers were, by the middle of 1974, without stable employment.

Here again, literacy deficiencies appear to be a major problem. Interviews of local educators from both the public school system and the national adult literacy program, yielded estimates of adult (18 years of age and above) literacy ranging from 25 to 34 percent. This has resulted in most of the skilled and semi-skilled (i.e., stable) jobs offered by factories going to people not indigenous to the area, while the majority of the Havershomians are either underemployed, irregularly employed, or chronically unemployed.

Interviews taken from personnel directors at the various factories in Havershom revealed comments similar to the following:

> "Most of the indigenous people are not able to work here. We are getting very technical in our production and require a higher standard than any of the other factories around here. Ours is a food industry and requires a certain standard. We cannot even meet the national demand for our product, because on our applications, we ask people to do simple calculations, you know some simple adding, multiplying, dividing. People

> can't do that. But we have to ask them. And as the company becomes more technical people who might have worked here for years may find themselves on the outside as new methods are introduced. The women do a little better on the tests than the men."

The demand for such skills grows as technological demands in industry grow. It is held by the managerial personnel in Havershom that the closing of the sugar factory was a result of its failure to keep abreast technologically with its competitors.

There are ample opportunities, however, for irregular or casual employment. Most of the sugar estates and industries offer seasonal (6 to 7 months) employment either on a full(5 - 7 days per week) or part time (2 days per week) basis. Industrialization has also brought a sizeable white collar class, who with the local elite and a small group of expatriates offer a range of part and full time service employment, including domestic work, gardening and washing, repairing and driving cars, and so on. There is also full and part time menial, and periodic short term employment offered by the local public service agencies, including the Parish Council.[4] In 1974 these jobs paid between J$2 and J$4 per day. With the phenomenal increase in the cost of living during the past decade, this does not go far in supporting families in the new cash economy. For example, between 1967 and 1974 such Jamaican staples as breadfruit and irish potatoes increased in retail price by 200 and 300 percent. In the face of such difficulties, I found that such "inevitables" as residence, kinship, and mating were used in Havershom as strategies for survival.

Household and Kinship

One of the interesting things revealed in the household survey was the size of some of the households, the considerable number with non-nuclear family members (parents and children) and the extent of the kinship ties of these various members. Fifty-four of the 238 households (22.7 percent) had eight or more members, and 108 households (45.4 percent) had non-nuclear members. There were four categories of relatives present in these households. The first group, I call Secondary Consanguines. The phrase is used to denote consanguineal relatives linked by an intermediate kin. For example, a person's mother's brother and he would be secondary consanguines, with the mother— sister as the intermediate kin. There were 54 households having secondary consanguines. The next largest category were the households with Affinal Consanguines. Affinal consanguines are the consanguines of one's mate, including the mate's children parented in a prior union or "outside children."[5] Affinal consanguineal households also included mate's parents, grandparents, siblings, parents' siblings, and even the children of outside children. There were 33 such households. The third category were Tertiary Consanguines. Tertiary consanguines are consanguineal relatives linked by two or more intermediate relatives. For example, a man and his mother's brother's son are tertiary consanguines. His mother and her brother are the intermediate relatives. There were 10 households with tertiary consanguines present. The final type of category is that of Consanguineal Affines. Consanguineal affines are the affinal relatives of an individual's consanguineal relatives. For example, a man's sister's husband's sister would be his consanguineal affine. There were 6 households with such relatives

present. There were 66 households with various combinations of these non-nuclear relatives.

Another interesting thing about Havershom households was the fact that many of the (87 or 36.6 percent) cited some of the members as temporary. Temporary household members were individuals who spend some days of the week, weeks of the month, or months of the year residing elsewhere. Temporary residents often times included nuclear family members as well as non-nuclear, and persons of all age groups, but particularly children. Quite frequently, however, (76 cases), temporary members were also non-nuclear members.

Not only do Havershom households act as recipients of non-nuclear relatives, but they also parcel out nuclear relatives to the households of other relatives. Here again, children are quite mobile. One hundred and seventy-one households had at least one child living elsewhere. These children included those parented together by the conjugal pair, or parented in prior unions.

Two interesting phenomena underlay this residential flexibility: (a) the use of kinship alliances for economic purposes; and, (b) the extension of these alliances to include affines. We shall first discuss the economic interplay between kinsmen, and later we shall discuss affines.

Kinship and the Economic Factor

The utilizations of kinship alliances for economic purposes was bi-directional: (1) Needy kinsmen were given support for certain services; and, (2) The extended kinship unit provided a labor force capable of getting the maximal return from the available economic opportunities. Older and

and young non-nuclear (as well as nuclear) relatives, who were not economically self-sufficient, or did not have their own nuclear relatives to support them, were given necessary support for certain types of domestic chores such as babysitting, cleaning, cooking, running errands, and so on.

It was interesting to find that the period of residents for many temporary relatives coincided with the "crop season." In Havershom, the "crop season" begins in January and may end in June or it may run through September. These variable dates are a function of the yield of the sugar crops being produced by the five surrounding sugar estates. The January to June date is the dry season and the period for harvest. The wet season begins around the end of June and runs through November. This is the planting season. The harvest period is the period of the greatest activity because of the rigorous effort needed. Some of the adult and adolescent temporary residents come into the area from the surrounding hill communities for work, and in a bumper year, they would stay around to take on jobs in the factories unloading and stocking the cane in the factory yard, or feeding it directly into the carriers which feed the mills. During the harvest season, the fields and the factories operate seven days a week, and twenty-four hours a day. During this period, a large household can take advantage of this surplus work, and residential congestion is not what it seems on the surface. During this heavy work period, young children are often shipped out to the households of older kinsmen.

Work is also provided during this period by the fruit orchards where a large number of women and children work. "Higglering"[5] also becomes more active as a response to the demographic swelling in the area.

Many of the temporary residents come from the surrounding hill communities where the extended kinship unit owns family plots[6] upon which foodstuffs are produced for "family" consumption, and surplus to be sold in the market system. This production is complemented by other "family" members who concentrate on the fish in the river that runs through Havershom.

After taking advantage of these various employment opportunities, many "families" reinvest "surplus" profits to: (1) buy motor vehicles to rent out to the various plantations and factories (trucks), or as passenger vehicles (cars and vans), the latter then running between Havershom, Spanish Town, and Kingston seven days per week; or, (2) buy family land in Havershom to be either leased out to tenants, or to build more or larger houses for the "family."

Mating and Affines

This type of family economic dynamics is not limited to consanguineal relatives, but also include affines. The word affine usually refers to "relatives by marriage." In the Havershomian, and the wider West Indian context, the term should be used to refer to relatives through consensual cohabitation, for the vast majority of the cohabiting unions are consensual and once a man and a woman cohabitate, their respective consanguineal kinship groups often become "kinsmen." This fact is validated not only by the use of kinship terms to denote such, but by the resulting kinship behavior.

The widespread practice of consensual mating has traditionally been considered to be a dysfunctional aspect of West Indian family structure. But it plays a function by expanding the "kinship network," the significant others with whom one becomes associated through culturally charged bonds of rights and obligations.

One of the primary arguments against West Indian consensual mating is that such unions tend to be brittle, and therefore not conducive to stable family relationship (Simey, 1946; Henriques, 1953; Blake, 1961). However, proving that legal unions are of greater duration than consensual unions in the West Indies would be very difficult if not impossible because the two conjugal patterns are stages of the same process. That is, many West Indian enter unions of both types during the life cycle, consensual unions preceding legal ones. In attempts at comparing duration, would one categorize a union by the first union an individual enjoys, the longest union, or the union that he is in at the time of the investigation? If a person has been in a consensual union for 20 years, a legal one for 3, is that person placed in the consensual category with a significant longevity of 20 years, or would he be placed in the legal category with an insignificant longevity of 3 years? And if both unions are to the same mate, as most of the present legal unions in Havershom are (out of only 48 legal unions, 33 of them are to people who first experienced a consensual union together), would it be correct to place that individual in either category. It is because of such analytical difficulties that such comparisons are out of place in the West Indies.

The assumption of greater longevity of legal unions is probably the result of a cultural bias reflecting the Euro-American emphasis on the nuclear unit and the conjugal bond as preferable in family relationships. But from cross-cultural studies, anthropologists have long argued that the major function of matrimony is to confirm an alliance of the two consanguineal groups to which the participating conjugal partners are members (Levi-Strauss, 1949). This certainly seems to be the case in Havershom.

In Haversham when a man and woman establish a household, either consensual or affinal, members of their respective kinship groups frequently refer to each other as kinsmen, both through terminology and reciprocal behavior. But of even more relevance is that even in the case of a dissolution of the union, this kinship alliance will, in the case of some members remain intact. This is strongly evidenced by the membership in a number of the Haversham households. For example, a fifteen year old boy lives in the home of his father's wife's father. This is an example of a man supporting a daughter's husband's child by another woman. On the other hand, we also have a case of a sixty year old woman living in the home of her dead husband's son by another woman.

But this pattern of persisting alliances between affinal relatives after the dissolution of the conjugal union is best illustrated in patterns of informal adoption so widely documented in the Caribbean (Kerr, 1963; M.G. Smith, 1962). In Haversham we have Mrs. Valdez who has adopted the son of her ex-common-law husband's brother. Mrs. Valdez refers to the child as her "nephew." Mrs. Cloning adopted the daughter (Constance) of a female relative (Mrs. Taylor) who was under great economic stress, and who without a husband found it most difficult to try to raise her eight children. The realtionship between the two women was not consanguineal, but "affinal." Mrs. Taylor had at one time been a consensual mate to Mrs. Cloning's father's brother's son. Neither was Constance consanguineally related to Ms. Cloning, for Constance's father was not Ms. Cloning's cousin, but a later mate of Mrs. Taylor's. However, the "tie" of kinship between Ms. Taylor and Mrs. Cloning resulted not only in similar ties between Constance and Mrs. Cloning but also gave Constance access to Mrs. Cloning's

kindred, with whom she now has kinship rights and obligations. Mrs. Cloning states that she had to help her cousin (referring to Mrs. Taylor).

Conclusions and Implications

Studies of family in the Caribbean cannot be limited to the traditional sociological studies in which family was considered to be homologous to the domestic unit. As Gonzales has so eloquently pointed out, family seems to be mostly defined in terms of kinship networks (1970:232). Among family members, there develops bonds of right and obligations that usually do not exist among non-family members. In a word a person should be able to depend on "family" when he can depend on no one else, and as such he is obligated to reciprocate such behavior.

As a part of the kinship unit, an individual may include whatever kinsmen with whom he has developed patterns of familiarity, rights, and obligations, regardless of the biological proximity. That is, a person may include a mother's father's brother's daughter's son as a part of his "family construct" and not include his own brother, if he has developed close bonds of familiarity, rights, and obligation with the former and not the latter.

This inclusion of distant relatives into the family construct may also include affines, even after the conjugal relationship linking the affinal relatives has been dissolved. This idea is different from those writers like Gonzalez (1970), Stack (1974) and Wilson (1973) who argue for a strong consanguineal bonds, but weak conjugal ties. The strength of conjugality may not always lie in the relationship between the participating couple, but in the opportunity for kinship behavior among the

two kinship groups. This finding in Havershom is similar to that of Whitten among Afro-Americans in San Lorenzo, Ecuador (1965).

The implication of this type of kinship analysis brings us back to the debate on Afro-American family structure being a result of "Africanisms" (Herskovits, 1941), slavery (Frazier, 1939) or economic marginality (Clarke, 1957; R.T. Smith, 1956; Gonzalez, 1969). The pursuit for explanations of Afro-American patterns might be more fruitful if we can pull ourselves from the emphasis on the nuclear unit, and begin to do more rigorous analysis of the larger kinship unit. We might find that such patterns do have their roots in Africa, and have facilitated the survival of Afro-Americans through the cruelties of slavery and post-slavery economic deprivation.

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NOTES

[1]In 1974 the Jamaican dollar (J$1.00) was worth one American dollar and eleven cents (U.S.$1.11).

[2]While only 1 percent of the GDP went to foreigners in the 1950's, almost 7 percent of the GDP flowed into foreign hands in 1968 (Jefferson, 1972:51).

[3]The internal market system in Jamaica has its genesis in the slave period when slaves were given plots of ground to grow their own good stuffs. Even during that period there were exchange of foodstuff, and some slaves were allowed to sell their produce to other plantations. But this system really began to mushroom immediately after the abolition of slavery, when slaves developed free peasant communities with family plots where foodstuffs were produced for consumption, and surplus was exchanged.

[4]The Parish Council is responsible for such public works as road maintenance. Thus when there is such work to be done in the community, local people are hired as casual workers until the job is completed.

[5]Higglers, nearly all women, are the middle men in the internal market system. They are also called "vendors," "speculators," or "wholesalers." They grow some produce for selling, and buy other for resale (Katzin, 1960).

[6]Following emancipation, a number of ex-slaves picked out small plots of land, on hillsides and other areas, not desirable to the large estate holders, where they squatted, or bought. This land became family land, to be inherited by the descendants of the original ex-slave owner. This process of buying family land still goes on in Jamaica (Clarke, 1967).

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